



Conference Paper

The Culturogenesis of the Historical Turns

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Abstract

The object of the study is the culturogenesis of the historical turns, which the author defines as the 'shifts in history', that is, the sharp, seemingly unexpected changes in the vectors of historical development. Historical turns are usually associated with the changes in political system or political development that induce radical transformations in the lifestyle, economic makeup, economic and international situation of the country, ideology and mentality of the society. These complex sociocultural transformations lead to the emergence of global internally contradictory hybrid culturogeneses that become the basis for international unions and alliances, as well as for local and global conflicts.

Keywords: historical turns, culturogenesis, cultural and historical paradigm, cultural and historical shift, socio-cultural explosion, cultural mechanisms

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Received: 22 November 2018

Accepted: 29 November 2018

Published: 23 December 2018

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the Facets of Culture in the Age of Social Transition Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

The research area of this article is *culturogenesis* – a concept that is usually interpreted as the genesis of culture. The concept of culturogenesis is used particularly often when talking about the emergence of human culture in prehistory – that is, about the development of culture from the non-culture, or a transformation of some part of (humanized) nature into culture.

However, the concept of 'culturogenesis' has another important, but relatively rare, definition: the cultural genesis of certain phenomena and processes (social, politician, even natural) not directly related to culture *per se*. In this case, we propose that such phenomena are culturally determined and conditioned. Among such phenomena is the culturogenesis of the historical turns – that is, of the sharp, even seemingly unexpected *changes in the vectors of historical development*. Therefore, the novelty and relevance of our point in this article is the idea that historical turns are produced not by the willful actions of concrete historical figures and even less by the chance combinations of favorable or unfavorable historical circumstances (the randomness of history), but



rather by a general socio-cultural situation and cultural environment that prompt people to act in certain – and not in other – ways, and compel historical circumstances to follow a certain course. These factors are the subjects of this paper.

2. The Problem of the Historical Turns

Historical turns are often produced by a kind of tectonic ‘shocks’ happening in mental sphere – shocks that are generated by the escalation of key problems of historical development. These shocks require radical solutions to overcome this situation and to renew a socio-cultural environment.

We are talking here about the ‘*projection* of the normalizing intentions of the first tectonic order into the *projective fields of the human life-space*’ [9, p. 90], with the only difference that the phenomenon of the ‘projections of the first tectonic order’ originally works at the ‘zero cycle’ of culturogenesis where ‘universal invariant meaning-producing matrices are formed’ [9, p. 91]: qualitative, visual, role-relating, mythological. In our case, we are talking about a much later (probably a secondary or a tertiary one) stage of the projections of the first tectonic order, where we witness the development of equally universal matrices of historical meaning-production (the models of the historical process), which spontaneously find in society the most appropriate organizers, performers and practical forms of realizing corresponding intentional projections.

According to such influential theorists of culture as A.S. Ahiezer, A.A. Pelipenko and I.G. Yakovenko, the problem of historical turns lies in interaction and alternation between the two mechanisms of *constructive* cultural tension [1, pp. 863–864] – *inversion* and *mediation* [9, pp. 859–861]. Inversion processes unfold as an interaction between the opposing ends of binary oppositions within a *closed* system incapable of generating new meanings and, therefore, incapable of historical development. On the other hand, mediative processes ‘sublate’ binary oppositions by producing new transitional meanings in an *open* system [9, p. 67]. Thus, the system is going through its historical development by overcoming the split that inversion makes inevitable. These theorists believe that this can explain the historical discontinuity and cyclic patterns in Russian culture and society (for example, seven-member cycles described by A. Ahiezer in his theory of the ‘critique of Russian historical experience’). Ultimately, different stages and cycles in the development of each civilization are divided and, at the same time, combined, in fateful historical turns.

However, just as a culture has mechanisms of *constructive tension* it also has regulatory mechanisms that can be called mechanisms of *destructive tension*. They are understood even less compared to the constructive mechanisms. One of these socio-cultural regulators is *eristic* (from the Greek *eristikos* meaning 'art of dispute') [5, pp. 112–113]. This regulatory mechanism means a *refusal to choose* between the existing opposing strategies, and a desire to reach 'beyond' all binary oppositions. Intervening into an argument between mediation and inversion, eristic models of socio-cultural passivity and situational indifference.

During the times of crisis and 'troubles', at the 'fractures' between the historical eras, eristic creates a 'zone of value and meaning uncertainty' and erodes standards and boundaries between different areas, facilitating radical revaluation of values and renegotiation of existing stereotypes and clichés, thereby helping to overcome the conflict of interpretations. This is why this type of socio-cultural tension has a *destructive* component, which *re-encodes* cultural semantics from the 'old' symbolic language to a 'new' one – that is, it serves as an implicit mechanism of *transition* from one cultural-historical paradigm to the other [6, pp. 13–17].

During the periods of reduced public engagement or political disturbance, eristic supersedes both mediation and inversion, revealing the *destructive tension* that blocks all socio-cultural choices faced by an individual and by society at large and transforms an act of choosing itself into a symbolic game, in a kind of '*l'art pour l'art*'. However, prolonged existence of this semantic uncertainty is a historical impossibility: semantically 'empty' space becomes a magnet for unpredictable chaotic processes that are other laden with the possibility of a socio-cultural 'explosion' or capable of initiating a new historical turn.

3. The Mechanisms of Cultural Destruction

The main mechanism of destructive tension is the 'splitting of cultural core' [3, p. 387]. The destructiveness of this mechanism that underlies historical social and cultural revolutionary processes and transformations manifests itself in a sudden 'split' in the meaning of key words, notions and concepts of culture: they split between the two opposing and irreconcilable meanings. This means that, despite having a common official language, a society or a community actually uses two different cultural languages

locked into a semantic conflict. These languages are appropriated by different communities with diametrically opposing interests, value orientations, ideals and socio-cultural practices. An 'argument about words' is followed by a fierce struggle for the opposing goals.

During such periods, divergent social and cultural processes win over the cumulative processes, leading to the interiorization of social conflict by the deeper cultural and mental structures. As a result of this escalating socio-cultural divergence, societal *split* and further *escalation of conflict* (up to and including a civil war) become inevitable and unavoidable. In this respect, 'splitting' mechanism is much more destructive than eristic. Eristic encourages an intentionality 'vacuum' of culture, a semantic 'hiatus' creating a space for historical innovations. The 'splitting of cultural core' produces a 'conflict of interpretations', a semantic 'chaos', a discord of contradicting meanings: all these states require a cultural-historical shift, an abrupt paradigm change. Most often the resolution of such 'congestions' of meaning takes a form of socio-cultural explosion with unpredictable destructive consequences [8, pp. 176–179; 257–258].

4. The Space of the Semantic Uncertainty

Both mechanisms of cultural destruction – eristic and/or splitting – engender the *space of the uncertainty of meaning (entropy)*: a state of culture which is ultimately unsustainable. Any human activity is limited by uncertainty; its goal is 'transformation of uncertainty into partial uncertainty', 'transformation of entropy into something more orderly; structuring' [7, p. 48]. This is, essentially, the meaning of historical turns aimed at *overcoming the* sociocultural and historical entropy, at the *escape* from the situation of semantic uncertainty.

Contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou introduced the concept of '*preparedness for an event*' which determines the strategy of individuals and societies prepared to face uncertainty. "To be prepared for an event' means being subjectively disposed to recognizing new possibilities [...] Being prepared for an event consists in being in a state of mind where one is aware that the order of the world or the prevailing powers don't have absolute control of the possibilities' [2, pp. 12–13].

If we acknowledge this, then 'the uncertainty contains not only unpleasant emotions but also an important positive potential for humans who, by developing a balanced approach to uncertainty, may discover its positive possibilities' [7, p. 10]. This concerns community as much as the larger society: the situation of semantic uncertainty mobilizes its subject raising his or her preparedness for uncertainty, thereby raising their

preparedness for a future event, for a coming historical turn, possible, inevitable or necessary – and, finally, for a direct participation in this turn.

An inexhaustible variety of cultural meanings preparing historical turns create their multi-layer and multiple-meaning *culturogenesis*. This culturogenesis contains layers of certain and uncertain semantics, influenced by different culturogenic mechanisms that create both constructive and destructive tension, disorienting or mobilizing the subjects of a cultural-historical process. Culturogenesis may be individual, local or global in character, which may have different consequences and cultural (social, political, moral, religious, aesthetic or artistic) meanings for the historical turns of different levels of generalizations.

5. Conclusions

Within the global historical processes, historical turns are always preceded by the complex interactions between local culturogeneses (collisions, struggle, interpenetration and synthesis). These complex sociocultural transformations lead to the emergence of global internally contradictory hybrid culturogeneses (which begin as a sum of culturogeneses) that become the basis for international unions and alliances, local and global conflicts, and, in extreme cases, of regional and world wars [4, pp. 488–497]. The study of this supra-complex culturogeneses and their interactions should be the task of further historical and historical-phenomenological research within the cultural-philosophical approach.

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